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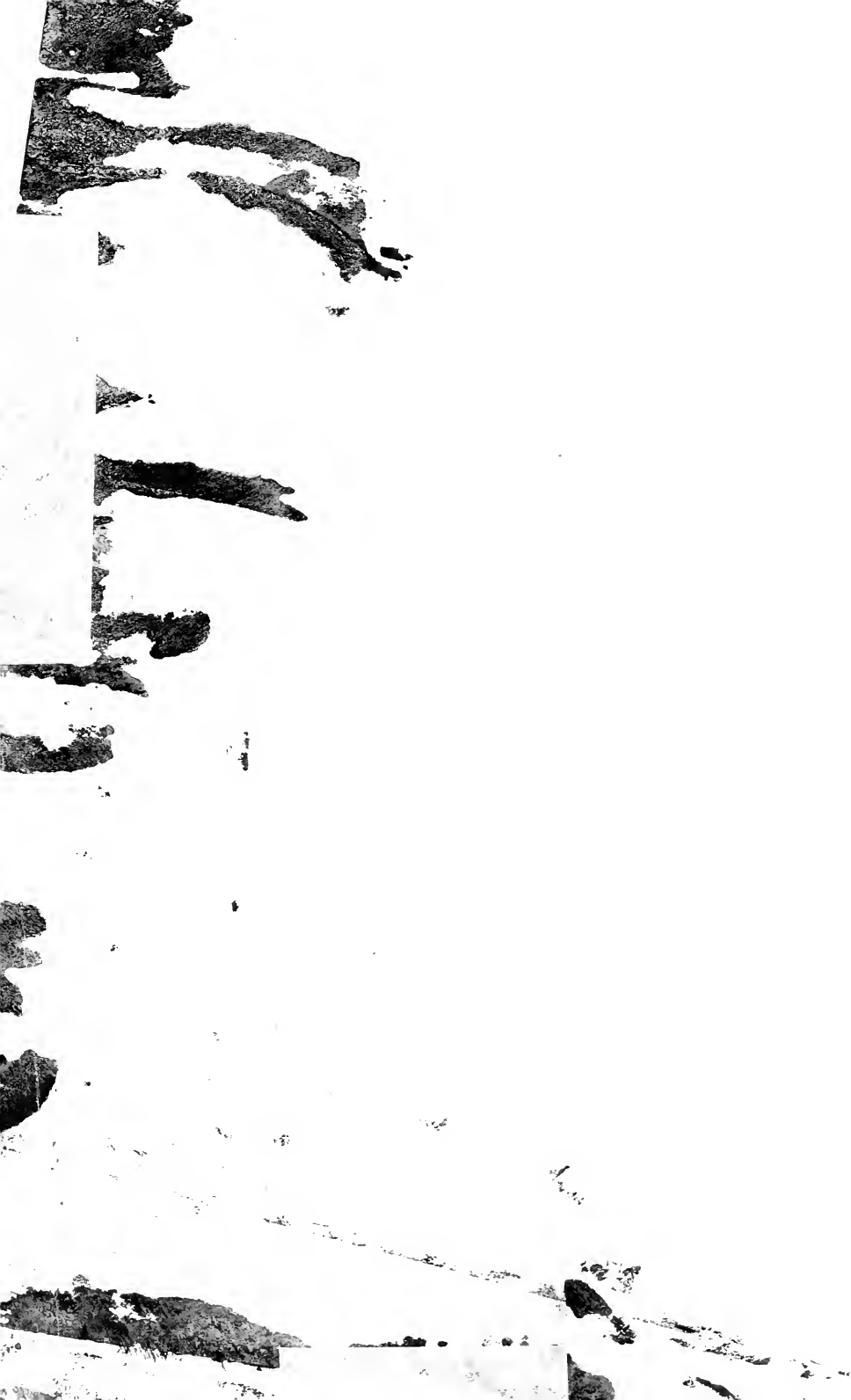
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AN ORATION

CHARACTER AND DEEDS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.



AN ORATION
ON THE
CHARACTER AND PUBLIC SERVICES
OF
ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

DELIVERED BY
REV. C. H. FOWLER, A. M.
IN BRYAN HALL, CHICAGO, ILL.



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Correspondence.

CHICAGO, SEPT. 27, 1867.

REV. C. H. FOWLER:

Dear Sir,—The undersigned, a committee acting on behalf of your numerous friends, who are desirous of preserving in a permanent form your analysis of the character and eulogy of the life of the late President Lincoln, delivered originally at the services memorial of his death, in the First M. E. Church of Chicago, and afterwards repeated by request of Hons. F. C. Sherman, J. B. Rice, E. C. Larned, John M. Wilson, and other distinguished citizens of the city, in Bryan Hall, on the day of the interment at Springfield, of the remains of the lamented dead—would respectfully request a copy of the manuscript for publication.

HON. GRANT GOODRICH,
R. F. QUEAL,
A. E. BISHOP,
FERNANDO JONES,
E. H. GAMMON,
T. M. BURKITT,
C. TRUDEAU,
B. HALBROOK.

HON. GRANT GOODRICH, R. F. QUEAL, A. E. BISHOP, FERNANDO JONES, E. H. GAMMON, T. M. BURKITT, C. TRUDEAU, B. HALBROOK.

Gentlemen,—Your request for a copy of the manuscript of the address on Mr. Lincoln, delivered by me, is received. I thank you for your consideration of its author, and am pleased with your interest in the memory of the *great* President, and herewith furnish the desired copy.

Respectfully yours,

C. H. FOWLER.

CENTENARY PARSONAGE, Chicago, Oct. 1, 1867.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Four years ago Illinois gave to the nation a President, to the world a hero, and to humanity a model. To-day she receives him into her aching bosom a sainted martyr, and covenants, before God and in the solemn presence of the opening infinite future, that for the nation, and for the world, and for humanity, she will guard his sacred ashes with all the tenderness of a mother. Proud have we been of the offering we have made. But grief, that will not be comforted, is ours for the price we have paid to Him who has led us to glory through anguish. As we bow with the mourning millions of America around the open grave, and wait for the angel's trump to waken the martyred sleeper, it is fitting that we should study his marvelous character and inhale the fragrance of his memory, that we may emulate his many virtues.

The analysis of Mr. Lincoln's character is difficult on account of its symmetry. Its comprehension is to us impossible on account of its immensity, for a man can be comprehended only by his peers. Though we may not get its altitude, nor measure its girth, nor fathom its depths, nor estimate its richness, we may stretch our little selves up against it, and get somewhat of the impress of its purity, the inspiration of its heroism, and the impulse of its power.

The foundation of his character was his *moral sense*. This contains the secret of his steadiness and consistency, for the first question he always asked, was, "Is it right?" His moral sense was manifested in absolute truthfulness. It gave him moral uprightness. It kept him unseduced by the temptations of his profession, untainted by the corruptions of politics, unblamable in public administration. It covered him like a mantle of light and purity, let fall upon him from the worlds out of sight.

Guided by an invisible hand, like a bird of passage, he moved ever toward his unseen destiny. Supported by the Infinite, he came calmly to the people, confident of the ultimate triumph of the right. This made him hopeful in the darkness and steady in the light.

The leading faculty of his mind was his *Reason*. His ideas came out in syllogisms. His mind acted with the fearful certainty of logic. Toned up by his moral consciousness, his reason controlled with the inflexibility of despotism, every element of his being, even his passions and compassions, and determined every act of his life. He arrived at conclusions not by intuition, but by argument. This made him appear slow in difficult questions, but it gave him all the certainty of logic and the abiding convictions of duty. Thus his mental organization gave him the felt consciousness of power. This made inevitable that firmness which was more than equal to every emergency, and which amazed the civilized world. Once at a decision, he could not be moved from it. He had a quick perception of the relations of things, and an accurate and almost infallible memory. These furnished the premises of his

arguments. His deep penetration of character, and thorough knowledge of human nature, scrutinizing ever the motives, purposes, and possibilities of men, gave him the right instruments for the execution of his plans. Here he was also logical rather than intuitional. Advancing from facts, and not from impressions, he saw power in men whom we condemned, and rejected men to whom we clung. His imagination and speculative faculties were of great native strength; but they were so subjected to his reason that they only seemed to suggest courses of action in unprecedented difficulties, and illustrated by condensed arguments the correctness of his positions. Thus, in a day of our great impatience, we were convinced and quieted by his saying, "I never cross Rock River till I come to it." He confirmed our conviction of the wisdom of his renomination, by saying that, "The people will not trade horses in the middle of the stream." His wit was of the finest quality, and had a toughness and strength that often gave the people his own courageous hopefulness.

Thus we half forgot our defeats after the seven days' "change of base," when we heard him say to an applicant for a pass to Richmond, "My passes are not honored in that quarter. I have already given passes to two hundred thousand men wishing to go there, but they have not yet been admitted." His caution, that might have been a fault, was balanced by the certainty of his reason, so that it produced only a wise prudence. His whole character was rounded out into remarkable practical common sense. Thus his moral sense, his reason and his common sense, were the three fixed points through which the perfect circle

of his character was drawn, the sacred trinity of his great manhood. Had he lacked either of these he would have failed, and we would have been buried in the ruins of the Republic. Without the first, he would have been a villain; without the second, a bigot or a fool; without the third, a fanatic or a dreamer. With them all he was Abraham Lincoln.

This is the analysis of his character. Let us see how it wrought in his life.

His moral sense was the foundation of his character. It entered into all his calculations. He had ever the consciousness of the presence of Him who is above all, and over all, and who has ordained a standard of right which men may trample, but cannot repeal. This furnishes the key to an exalted life. Viewed from this standpoint, his history unfolds like a perfect argument. Starting from this, there is no escape from the sublime conclusions that have immortalized his memory. This gave him the ready solution of the problems that have perplexed and bewildered other statesmen. While others have asked, "What is expedient?" he asked, "What is right?" Thus he was saved from the endless and impossible calculations of probabilities as to results in popular judgment. Yet, studying the advantages of time and mode, he delayed while these made it necessary; but when the action was possible, the decision was taken, and the consequences committed to Him who rules and over-rules according to His good pleasure.

One result of his conscientiousness was the universal conviction of his honesty. Other men have been as honest as he was, but I know of no public man who has enjoyed such

universal confidence. This was not a whim of the people taken up by chance. It was the inevitable consequence of his business and professional habits. His estimates were based upon value received. Because he was necessary to a client was no reason for increasing his fee. His sense of moral honesty governed him where many good men do not seem to be sensitive. Having a pass over a railroad for his own pleasure, he did not feel at liberty to use it when on professional business. No common conscience could dictate such convictions. The rule that determined his advocacy of a cause was, whether it was right. Money and the chances for reputation in handling an important suit, were no temptations to him to undertake a bad cause. A gentleman in this city sought his services in an important land suit, and he replied, "From what little I know about the case, I think the other man ought to have the land." But upon examination he changed his mind, took and won the suit. Once in some small suit he found he was on the wrong side, and tried to be released by his client, but his client held him to his promise. When the trial came on, he simply stated the points of the case, but said not one word about a verdict, offered no argument, and walked out of the court room. The jury could not agree. In the second trial he did the same; yet the jury gave him the verdict, without argument, against the evidence, and against the law, simply because Mr. Lincoln was on that side; "For," said they, "Mr. Lincoln never takes the wrong side." One such man is enough to dignify and ennoble a profession for a thousand years; and were I a member of the Bar, I would cherish his memory as the devotee clings to his amulet.

This character for honesty made Mr. Lincoln President of the United States. Five years ago I stood in yonder Wigwam, and heard the Republican party announce "Honest Old Abe" as the leader of the ticket, and I said, "By the grace of God we will carry the country under that name."

We know somewhat of him through his Douglas campaign. But thousands throughout the length and breadth of the country who knew him only as "Honest Old Abe," voted for him on that account; and wisely did they choose, for no other man could have carried us through the fearful night of the last four years. When his plans were too vast for our comprehension, and his faith in the cause too sublime for our participation, when it was all night about us, and all dread before us, and all sad and desolate behind us—when not one ray shone upon our cause, when traitors were haughty and exultant at the South, and fierce and blasphemous at the North, when the loyal men here seemed almost in the minority, when the stoutest hearts quailed, the bravest cheeks paled, when generals were defeating each other for place, and contractors were leeching out the very heart's blood of the *prostrate* Republic, when everything else had failed us, we looked at this calm, patient man, standing like a rock in the storm, and said, "Mr. Lincoln is honest and we can trust him still." Holding to this single point with the energy of faith and despair we held together, and under God he brought us through to victory. And to-day, in this overwhelming grief that mourns a coffin in every house, we have the open judgment of mankind for *moral worth*.

Another characteristic dependent upon his moral sense, was his *magnanimity*. He saw all men under the eye of God as equals, and feeling the light of the Infinite above the finite he regarded the exaltation of one man above another but as the crawling of one worm over another. Little ambitions never embarrassed him. He sought always to benefit and bless his fellows and not to rule over them. By serving all he became chiefest. No trickery ever marked his movements. No unfair advantage was ever taken over an opponent or a rival. When promoted it was in spite of his request that some other man should be chosen. When the way was open upward he was always saying, "take this man or that man, he is competent." When the committee for the nomination of delegates to the Republican Convention of 1860 met, they wanted men that would be true to Mr. Lincoln. Feeling they were not sufficiently acquainted throughout the State, they went to Mr. Lincoln, stated their embarrassment, and asked him to name his friends. He replied, "Gentlemen, I can have nothing to do with this matter. If the people want me to be their President, they will look to that. If they do not want me I would not take the office. Nominate *good* men." When responsibility was to be assumed he was always ready to step into the breach. When the army was defeated and the nation was demanding somebody's head, he said: "I am responsible if there be blame." When the final and most glorious triumphs came, and he had been down to the front, and might possibly be credited with it, he said, "The glory of the plan and of the execution is not mine. It belongs to Gen. Grant and the

noble men under him. If rivals and personal enemies who had villified him were needed for high places they were raised to them all regardless of himself. He was the most magnanimous man that the world ever saw.

One of the most prominent facts in his life is his representative character. He incarnated the *ideal* Republic. No other man ever so fully embodied the purposes, the affections, and the power of the people. He came up among us. He was one of us. His birth, his education, his habits, his motives, his feelings, and his ambitions were all our own. Had he been born among hereditary aristocrats he would not have been *our* President. But born in the cabin, and reared in the field and in the forest, he became the GREAT COMMONER. The classics of the schools might have polished him but they would have separated him from us. But trained in the common school of adversity, his calloused palms never slipped from the poor man's hand. A child of the people, he was as accessible in the White House as he had been in the cabin. The griefs of the poor African were as sacred to him as were the claims of the opulent white man. Measuring all men by their humanity, he found them essentially equal. Hence, his marvelous patience under the pressure upon him of the poorest people. He never had an equal in this. Seeing in God the Common Father of all men, he saw in every man a brother. Making the Government the protector of every man in virtue of his humanity, and the creature of the majority in virtue of their numbers, he realized to the world in himself the ideal Republic.

As a speaker, Mr. Lincoln suffers *but little* by compari-

son with men whose greatest or only gift has been oratory. True, he did not equal the Philipics of Demosthenes. His heart was too kindly, and his nature too elevated to deal in invective. But in the certainty of his conclusions he was his *peer*. The classics had not polished him. But where in our language, or in the language of the old orators, can be found a sentence to surpass in dignity and power, in beauty and sublimity, the closing sentence of his Emancipation Proclamation. "Upon this act I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God." At Gettysburg the most finished and cultivated orator of the age delivered one of his master pieces. But when that has been forgotten the short speech of Mr. Lincoln, on that occasion, will be green in the memories of men. Those who look simply at the manner and not at the matter, who lose the man in his clothes, may not regard Mr. Lincoln as a marked speaker. But I appeal to you who have heard him—was there not that paramount something about his speaking that made you feel, as you left him, what he says is true, and he is honest!

As a politician, he was a leader. As an administrator, he was a guider. Few men, if any, ever equaled him in forecast of public sentiment. He seemed almost able to count the votes before the balloting. And the affections with which he inspired political friends made him the leader of his party. What other man, with the advantages all against him, could have contended so evenly with Douglas? Who could have given such strength to his party as he did in that campaign and in the campaign of 1860? As President it was his place to be not prow, but helm,

and right steadily he guided us safely through the breakers.

Here we approach the strong side of his character. *As a statesman*, his clear, accurate, comprehensive reason, and strong, practical common sense, place him far above his fellows. We were so attracted by the goodness of his heart, that we failed to see the power of his brain. Calmly, quietly, patiently working in the night when other men were asleep, he brought us out of the darkness to the day with movements so easy that we did not think them difficult. Taking the lead of the nation in troubled times, when old landmarks were broken down, when old precedents were useless, when new paths had to be beaten, new difficulties overcome, new forces controlled, new races recognized, the grasp and power of his intellect soon made him master of his position. He selected the ablest men of the nation for his Cabinet, and with confidence he drew them about himself trusting to his own ability to control them. Determined from the day of his election to be, *in fact*, the *head* of the Government, he chose men strong enough to yield to argument, and true enough to follow the consequences of their logic. Rivals were advanced to high positions, and through them he controlled their friends. Dangerous friends were sent abroad, where they could serve their country most and embarrass him least. Ability was the ground of promotion, and success the tenure of office. Thus, by a wise use of his prerogatives, factions were ultimately harmonized and all sections united. Being rational rather than intuitional, he adopted measures and selected men from facts, rather than from impressions. This made him slow, but his advance was as certain as destiny. Thus

he held on to Grant when the country demanded his head, and we now see that *that* head *might* have cost us our liberties. Thus he dropped Fremont and others at the height of their power. In one case other elements were complicated. The administration party would be true to the country under any man. The opposition, viewing things from a different standpoint, required management. The wise physician never undertakes an amputation till the patient is strong enough to survive the operation. This case was no exception to the rule of his action. For it must ever be remembered that the foundation of a Republican Government is the will of the people. The Chief Magistrate is not proprietor. He is only the executor. Mr. Lincoln was the President of a Republic, not the Tyrant of a Despotism. We were the Government; he was our servant. Therefore it was the consummation of statesmanship to adapt measures to the exigencies of the times. Had he arbitrarily fixed a purpose in the beginning and adhered to it to the end, we would have been lost. The policy of '63 would have desolated us in '61, and the policy of '61 would have ruined us in '63. Public opinion is the resultant of forces. It may not take the direction of any one force, but is modified by all the elements. In a country fifty-seven times as large as England, where millions of men are trained to think, to find the resultant is most difficult. But this resultant determines the possibility of action. To hold back one section and spur up another, and thus harmonize all, is no small task. This Mr. Lincoln accomplished. We called him slow and prayed God to give him back-bone, when, in fact, he had the stoutest spinal column in all the

land. Seen in the light of success, which is the ultimate demonstration of ability, he *was never too fast, never too slow*. When once he fixed his policy he never went back. When he moved, it was forward into the opening possibilities of the future. He was the ultimate judge of when and how to act. He received suggestions and gathered information from all sources, but he adopted or rejected as seemed to him best. A measure that would not do to-day was rejected, to be adopted to-morrow when it would do. And he put men up or down as the cause required. His Secretary of War did very much to secure his election, and, therefore, Mr. Lincoln was obligated to him; but Cameron had a theory that was too early, and grand old Stanton was called to his place—a wise choice—for to him, on that terrible Saturday, the nation clung as to a rock. Fremont, full of an idea, issued a proclamation. He struck too quick and exceeded his powers. Mr. Lincoln revoked his order, set him aside, and saved Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland. But when the time came he had strength enough to enact what he had nullified. What could have been more masterly than his treatment of Vallandigham? First, he sent him South where he could not induce desertions, then let him come home to defeat his party, which he did by his platform. With such certainty did Mr. Lincoln follow causes to their ultimate effects, that his foresight of contingencies seemed almost prophetic. While we in turn were calling him weak and stubborn and blind, Europe was amazed at his statesmanship, and awed into silence by the grandeur of his plans. Measured by what he did, Mr. Lincoln is a statesman without a peer. He stands alone in the

world. He came to the government by a minority vote. Without an army, without a navy, without money, without munitions, he stepped into the midst of the most stupendous, most wide spread, most thoroughly equipped and appointed, most deeply planned and infamous rebellion of all history. Traitors were in every department. Treason was the rule, loyalty was the exception. He was alone in Washington; armed foes were close at hand; his friends were away yonder in the North, and traitors hissed and rattled all over the loyal States. He conciliated rivals, united friends, flanked politicians, martialed Wall-street, defeated Copperheads and conquered foes. He stamped upon the earth and two millions of armed men leaped forward. He spoke to the sea and the mightiest navy the world ever saw crowned every wave. He breathed into the air and money and munitions rained upon the people.

His goodness is said to have made him weak. But here men have misjudged him. Seeing the exalted humanity of the act, they have overlooked the strength of the purpose. He has left behind not one word or act of mere impulse or passion. He avowed his purpose in the beginning "to palliate—not aggravate—the horrors of civil war." From this purpose he never moved. Suppliants at his knee, though of his own family, were kindly but sternly refused every request that did endanger the country. But when it came within his purpose wide amnesties were granted to his enemies. His goodness was the highest manifestation of his strength. To be good when all are sweeping by in the tide of evil, to resist a thousand grievances, a thousand malicious misrepresentations, and be forever misunderstood, and

yet be calm, loving, unimpassioned and forgiving, all regardless of self, is to be stronger than Robespierre and mightier than a hundred Neros. Were I to choose but two scenes to represent his life they should be these: one, his giving the Proclamation of Emancipation, which brings out his firmness and his justice, and makes him the Emancipator; the other, the restoration of the widow's son, showing justice and humanity. Poorly clad, weeping and pale, she said to him, "Mr. President, I had three sons and a husband in the army; my husband has just been killed, and I came to ask back my oldest boy." He granted the request. She took the order, went to the field only to see that oldest son die from his wounds. She went again to the President with the statement of the facts by the surgeon. Mr. Lincoln read the backing on the order and said, "I know what you want, you need not ask for it, I will give you your next son," saying as he wrote, "you have one and I have one; that is about right." The poor woman standing by him smoothed his hair with her hands, saying, while her tears fell upon his head, "God bless you, Mr. President, may you live a thousand years and be the head of this great nation." This was no weak point in the great man's character, for his goodness was as systematic as his statesmanship, and into its exercise there never entered merely personal motives. Constitutionally merciful, he was also constitutionally logical and conscientious. Above his mercy stood his reason, to detect the possible consequence of any action, and behind that was his moral sense to bow him to the dictates of his judgment in spite of the impulses of his heart. No man ever surpassed him in the subjection of

his life to his convictions. Weak, he *was* called, but *now*, all thoughtful men admit his great firmness. His almost prophetic foresight of contingencies required the firmness of a martyr to hold him to plans incomprehensible to extremists who clamored for measures that would have been fatal. Sometimes he stood alone against the body of Congress, but Congress always yielded, and the end justified the action. Had he consented to the Confiscation Bill of '61, with all its provisions, his amnesty would never have thinned the rebel ranks. He sent three questions to the War Committee concerning the arming of the negroes, to be put to all the Generals that came before it. They were presented to ninety-two Generals; of that number, eighty-five answered firmly against the policy, two Major Generals and five Brigadiers answered for it. The next day, after the report was made to him by the War Committee, he issued his order for arming the negroes. Good he was, and compassionate; but no firmer man ever held the reins of power. He was mercy mailed in justice. He was taken from us not because he would have proved unequal to the hour to come, but rather because *we* were underrating the terrible crime of slavery that has caused all our woe. In the joy of victory we were willing to pardon for peace, and I verily believe that the future policy of Mr. Lincoln, as indicated to Secretary Seward, would have called down upon his head the curses of Christendom. But now all mouths are stopped as by his gaping wounds we have revealed to us the fearful enormity of the crime. He led us safely in the past when he alone could have done it, and he would have been equal to the future, but his fall has stricken all our

hearts, has opened the eyes of the world to see slavery as the sum of all villainies.

This woe has fallen upon us because we are living for the admonition of all time to come, to show mankind the solution of the problem of sin, and to demonstrate the power of free government. I must reject the theory that seeks the explanation of this providence in any supposed weakness of this wonderful man. For taken all and in all he rises head and shoulders above every other man of six thousand years. I would not pluck one laurel from the statues of the noble dead; I would rather place in their midst another statue that shall adorn and honor their glorified company. We are indeed too near Mr. Lincoln to award him the glory he deserves. We remember too well his long, lank form, his soiled clothing, his awkward movements, to realize that this man, standing among us like a father, yet looms above us like a monarch. I turn to the past; I see behind me a noble company. There is Napoleon, the man of destiny. Armies move at his bid as if they were the muscles of his body; kings rise and fall at his nod, but he lived for himself. His entire life was a failure. He did not accomplish one of his great purposes. I see a Wellington; great as a military chieftain, competent to command armies against a *foreign and hereditary foe*. I see Marlborough, but on every stone of his monument and in every page of his history I see the frauds by which he enriched himself from the plunder of his country. There is Cromwell, a fine old man, England's noblest son; but his arena was small, the work he undertook limited, the work he accomplished ephemeral. The revolution from the hereditary kingdom of the Stewarts

to the hereditary dictatorship of the Cromwells was not so great as the change from executing the Fugitive Slave Law in Boston to the Constitutional Emancipation of the slave in Maryland. Yet, upon his death the Government reverted to the Stuarts, but upon the death of Abraham Lincoln, Freedom rears a monument, and for new conquests marches boldly into the future. I do see a Cæsar yonder, but his power is the purchase of fraud and crime, and falls about his grave like withered weeds. And away down yonder in the dark vortex of history, looking out upon the centuries, is old Pericles. But the thirty thousand citizens of Athens are lost in some inland town of America with her thirty millions of citizens. There are many noble heroes who illumine the darkness behind us with the radiance of some single virtue, but among them all I see no Lincoln. He is radiant with all the great virtues, and his memory shall shed a glory upon this age that *shall fill the eyes of men* as they look into history. Other men have excelled him in some one point, but, taken at all points, all and in all he stands head and shoulders above every other man of six thousand years. An administrator, he saved the nation in the perils of unparalleled *civil* war. A Statesman, he justified his measures by their success. A Philanthropist, he gave liberty to one race and salvation to another. A Moralist, he bowed from the summit of human power to the foot of the Cross and became a Christian. A Mediator, he exercised mercy under the most absolute abeyance to law. A Leader, he was no partisan. A Commander, he was untainted with blood. A Ruler in desperate times, he was unsullied with crime. A man, he has left no word of passion, no thought

of malice, no trick of craft, no act of jealousy, no purpose of selfish ambition. Thus perfected without a model and without a peer, he was dropped into these troubled years to adorn and embellish all that is good and all that is great in our humanity, and to present to all coming time the representative of the divine idea of Free government. A child of the people, the poor man's friend; want was the passport to his heart, and helplessness the signal for his power. As the Great Father would not suffer David, though a man after His own heart, to build His temple, because he was a man of blood, so in our time He has reserved the just work of retribution for others, and having completed the great Temple of Freedom by the hands of Abraham Lincoln, He takes his spotless soul to Himself and sends his memory to history hallowed by his martyrdom to Liberty.



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